

From the Field: Outreach Team Helps Client Live Independently



From left to right: Jennifer Hernandez, Samilia Griffin, and Tylana Thomas

Upon discharge from a psychiatric hospital, Samilia Griffin was referred to the LACDMH SB-82 Mobile Triage Team of Jennifer Hernandez and Tylana Thomas from SA 4. The following is Samilia's story, in her own words:

I was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and moved to Las Vegas, Nevada, at six months of age. As a young child, I moved back and forth between my parents' homes. During this time I was exposed to several perpetrators. As a result, I became a victim of child abuse and molestation by my uncle, brother, sister and mother's boyfriends, so I was placed in the foster care system. At age eight, life improved because I moved in with my grandmother. However, around 11, I was told about my biological father, who is my half-sister's grandfather, and it left me feeling confused, hurt and betrayed. I thought I was truly loved by my mom and family but found myself unable to trust anyone. This caused me to rebel by drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes and engaging in relationships with adult men. Despite my behavior, I was still an "A" and "B" student throughout grade school and junior high. But once I got into high school, my grades and interest in learning decreased.

At the age of fifteen, I lived with my older sister, dropped out of school, started smoking marijuana and became pregnant. I had my first child when I was 16 years old by an abusive and controlling man. That relationship ended and at 19 years of age, I had my second son by another abusive man. By age 23, I was introduced to hard drugs by my mother and was selling narcotics from my apartment. On one occasion, I overdosed on ecstasy and was hospitalized. This lifestyle eventually led me to become homeless for the first time and I gave my two sons to relatives so they could care for them. I started prostituting and at 24 years of age moved to Los Angeles. All the pain and abuse left me vulnerable. I was manipulated into a five year relationship with a pimp who forced me to continue prostituting and become an exotic dancer. I ended up homeless again at 29 and was suicidal. I was placed on my third 5150 hold and was hospitalized for one week due to suicidal ideation. When I went into a recuperative care center in October, 2015, I was introduced to Tylana Thomas and Jennifer Hernandez from the SB-82 Mobile Triage Team.

Ms. Thomas and Ms. Hernandez helped place me in a faith based sober living home in Pomona but to my surprise I was again sexually exploited there by two Pastors. Being homeless, confused and not knowing better, I accepted the abuse in the beginning without sharing it with any one, as advised by the Pastors. It seems like everywhere I go I am accompanied by drugs, sexual exploitation and abuse. However, when I shared this with my case managers from SB-82 they immediately became involved and helped me to regroup in Los Angeles. When I had given up on my well-being, my case managers stayed with me, believed in me and gave me hope for another day. They have helped me engage in mental health treatment again, have provided resources to help me re-enter the workforce, attend school to get my GED and stay drug and alcohol free.

I am currently living in a shelter while I regain total independence and become more self-sufficient. My higher power has also played a great role in my mental stability by helping me become more mindful of life and its many challenges. I plan on getting a good paying job/career, finding permanent housing, continuing counseling and doing everything possible to mend my relationship with my sons and family.

Additionally, I'm fighting the pattern of making easy money, and am trying to avoid repeating the same mistakes, while clearing my criminal record. Five years from now, I see myself as the co-founder of a non-profit transitional living facility for men and women.